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**United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations**

## Letter dated 15 October 2001 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the summary of the "Twenty-first Century Forum — Symposium on Dialogue Among Civilizations", held in Beijing on 11 and 12 September 2001 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex distributed as a document of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 25.

(*Signed*) **Wang** Yingfan
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## Annex to the letter dated 15 October 2001 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

## Summary of the "Twenty-first Century Forum — Symposium on Dialogue among Civilizations", hosted by the External Affairs Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

In response to the call by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolutions 53/22 (1998), 54/22 (1999) and 55/23 (2000) on promoting dialogue among civilizations and in connection with activities related to the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, a "Twenty-first Century Forum — Symposium on Dialogue among Civilizations" was hosted in Beijing on 11 and 12 September 2001 by the External Affairs Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Twenty-eight diplomatic envoys and officials and foreign experts from the embassies of 18 countries in China and from the offices of various United Nations specialized agencies in China as well as over 40 Chinese experts and scholars in various fields attended the symposium. Mr. Song Jian, Vice-Chairman of CPPCC, President of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and a member of the United Nations Group of Eminent Persons on Dialogue among Civilizations, presided over the meetings and made a speech at the opening ceremony. The participants commended President Khatami of Iran for proposing the "dialogue among civilizations" initiative and the United Nations General Assembly for adopting the relevant resolutions. They carried out comprehensive in-depth discussions focusing on three topics: "the role of exchange among civilizations in promoting human historical development"; "the effect of dialogue among civilizations on the development of international relations"; and "the role of the United Nations in promoting dialogue among civilizations". The symposium was a complete success.

1. **On the role of exchange among civilizations in promoting human historical development**. The participants expressed the view that diversity in human civilizations should be recognized and respected and that diversity and divergence in civilizations were the valuable heritage and commonwealth of humankind. Dialogue, exchange and blending among different civilizations were necessary for their existence and continued development, providing the driving force for progress of human society, and constituted an inexorable trend in historical development. Exchange among civilizations contributed to the shared progress and prosperity of all humankind. The history of human civilization was a history of continuous exchange and blending. There was no distinction based on superiority or inferiority among human civilizations. They should learn from one another, draw on one another's experience and develop together on the basis of equality and mutual respect. The participants also stressed that participation in dialogue among civilizations should be expanded continuously, to include not only countries and their governments but also non-governmental organizations and the news media, as well as the peoples of all countries. Some participants also drew on the history of the development of the Chinese civilization to point out that dialogue and exchange among civilizations were not the simple, direct copying of the achievements of other civilizations, but should take into consideration the characteristics of each

indigenous civilization, embracing one another while evolving with the progress of time. A number of participants also exchanged views on the concept of civilization and the differences among civilizations.

II. **On the effect of dialogue among civilizations on the development of international relations**. The participants expressed the view that human civilization was rich and colourful and that it was normal to have differences among civilizations. Promoting dialogue among civilizations and settling differences appropriately by peaceful means to avoid conflict would help to promote mutual respect, harmony, comprehensive integration and shared development among peoples from different civilizational backgrounds, leading eventually to the establishment of a relationship of equality, mutual benefit, mutual trust and cooperation that would promote lasting peace and development in the world. The participants carried out a discussion focusing on the effect of economic globalization on the development of civilizations. They expressed the view that economic globalization would strengthen contact and interdependence among countries and regions, giving humankind unprecedented opportunities for development but at the same time confronting humankind with a wide range of global problems, such as environmental degradation, refugees, terrorism and a widening gap between North and South, bringing unprecedented shocks and challenges to all indigenous civilizations. In this situation, dialogue and reconciliation among civilizations became even more important. Dialogue among civilizations would help to promote dialogue between North and South and to respond to global problems, thus propelling all countries of the world towards shared prosperity and development. The participants were opposed to practices seeking to undermine diversity among civilizations in the name of globalization and imposing one's own values on other countries. All countries, large and small, rich and poor, strong and weak, were equal members of the international community. As the trend towards globalization continued to develop, it was becoming increasingly important that the principles of democracy and equity be adhered to in international affairs.

III. **On the role of the United Nations in promoting dialogue among civilizations**. The participants were of the view that the United Nations, as the only world organization with a truly universal character, was itself a typical representation of diversity in the world's civilizations, being the forum in which the world's civilizations came together. The participants pointed out that the proposal for dialogue among civilizations would help to overcome the negative effects that the long cold war had had on the United Nations. In particular, it would help to bring an end to cold-war thinking that continued to exist. That would be consistent with the United Nations purposes and principles of promoting world peace and stability. The United Nations had an irreplaceable role to play in facilitating the global process of dialogue among civilizations, raising the awareness of the international community with regard to respect for and the development of diversity among civilizations and promoting tolerance, equality and justice. The participants also stressed that since the United Nations was an international intergovernmental organization, the Governments of its Member States had primary responsibility for promoting the initiative for dialogue among civilizations. The United Nations should adopt a formal resolution affirming that all civilizations in the world are equal, calling for dialogue among civilizations and specifying the purposes, objectives, principles, roles and activities of that dialogue. A number of participants

also suggested that to adapt to the new situation, the United Nations should also carry out the necessary reforms to improve efficiency so as to better promote dialogue among civilizations.

The participants emphasized that dialogue among civilizations should not be just an expedient measure, but a long-term process. The activities of the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in 2001 had rekindled the interest of the international community in dialogue among civilizations and marked a new beginning for such dialogue. The participants expressed appreciation that the United Nations General Assembly would devote plenary meetings at its fifty-sixth session to the question of dialogue among civilizations. They wished the meetings success.